

LCQ9: Immigration clearance for visitors to Hong Kong

Following is a question by the Hon Rock Chen and a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr Tang Ping-keung, in the Legislative Council today (April 24):

Question:

At present, visitors to Hong Kong are required to furnish a completed arrival card in paper form for immigration clearance. However, it is learnt that other regions, such as Japan, Korea and Singapore provide electronic versions of arrival cards for inbound visitors to fill in online before departure or entry. There are views pointing out that such arrangement can reduce the waiting time for visitors for immigration clearance, and can also reduce the physical contact between visitors and staff as well as the use of paper. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that Hong Kong is an international city and is striving to develop into a "smart city", whether the authorities have plans to streamline the procedures for immigration clearance of visitors and introduce an electronic version of the arrival card; if so, of the specific plan and implementation timetable; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether it has collected and analysed the views and feedback of visitors to Hong Kong, so as to understand their expectations of and level of satisfaction with the existing immigration clearance procedures, and enhance the quality and efficiency of immigration clearance services in response to their needs and suggestions; and

(3) whether the authorities have exchanged views with immigration control authorities of other regions to draw reference from their experience and effectiveness in the use of electronic forms or other technologies in handling immigration clearance, and explore possible opportunities for co-operation and mutual connection, so as to bring more convenience and better experience to visitors to Hong Kong?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the questions raised by the Hon Rock Chen is as follows:

(1) and (3) The Immigration Department (ImmD) has all along reviewed its existing policies and measures regularly, and explored the use of innovative technologies proactively, with a view to providing efficient and high-quality services to the public and visitors.

According to sections 5(4) and 5(5) of the Immigration Ordinance (Cap 115), except for persons exempted by the Director of Immigration under section 5(9), any person of or over the age of 16 years shall furnish a duly completed arrival or departure card in the prescribed form on his arrival in or prior to his departure from Hong Kong. If the person concerned is of or over the age of 7 years and under the age of 16 years and is accompanied by an adult, the adult shall furnish in respect of such person a duly completed arrival or departure card in the prescribed form.

To streamline the procedures for immigration clearance, eligible Hong Kong residents and certain categories of inbound visitors (i.e. (i) holders of Exit-Entry Permit for Travelling to and from Hong Kong and Macao or a Chinese Travel Permit issued by the Mainland authorities or (ii) Macao permanent residents holding Macao Smart Permanent Identity Card) are currently not required to furnish the arrival or departure card for immigration examination. The ImmD will continue to review the arrangements of declaration from visitors upon arrival or departure from time to time.

Separately, the ImmD is also drawing reference from the experience and practices of other regions and actively studying the feasibility of introducing an electronic version of the arrival or departure card or other technologies in handling immigration clearance. The scope of study includes the related legal basis, system requirements, hardware facilities, and operational workflow, so as to further streamline the immigration arrangements and make it more convenient to visitors. The ImmD will strive to complete the relevant study by the end of this year and decide on the way forward of the improvement plan based on the study outcome.

(2) The ImmD attaches great importance to the suggestions of the public and visitors on its services and provides various channels, including telephone, fax, email or post, to facilitate the public and visitors to provide feedback to the ImmD. Immigration officers at various control points are also willing to listen to suggestions provided by the public and visitors on ground. The ImmD will examine its existing facilities and arrangements from time to time and implement improvement measures having regard to the feedback collected, with a view to further enhancing the immigration services provided to the public and visitors.